



Report on the Rhode Island Correctional Population FY 1976 - FY 2005

Prepared by the Planning & Research Unit

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Introduction

This report was created to summarize all of the existing data describing the Rhode Island correctional population. The Planning & Research Unit has maintained offender data since 1976; therefore, this report contains data from 1976 to 2005. Prior to 1992, data are not available in electronic form. As a result, information in this report is constrained by what data elements were manually collected.

The RI Prison System:

The state of Rhode Island operates a unified correctional system, meaning that all offenders (i.e., those awaiting trial, sentenced, and under community supervision) in the state are under the jurisdiction of RI Department of Corrections (RIDOC). In this report, “Total Population” refers to total custodial population, which excludes offenders living in the community with electronic monitoring devices.

Data Caveats:

As noted above, there are limitations to what data are included in this report based on what information was manually collected. In some cases, data were not available at standard intervals. Please pay special attention to the text, as it will identify the specific time period covered.

Another limitation of the data is that by and large, only the most serious offense for an offender is recorded. While it is possible to analyze current data for additional charges/sentences, it is not the case for data that was previously collected.

More Information:

For more information on this report, please contact the Erin Boyar, Associate Director of Planning & Research at the RIDOC (401-462-3920).



Acknowledgements

This report is one of many products of the Planning and Research Unit at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. As with all projects, particular individuals were asked to assist in the completion of this report.

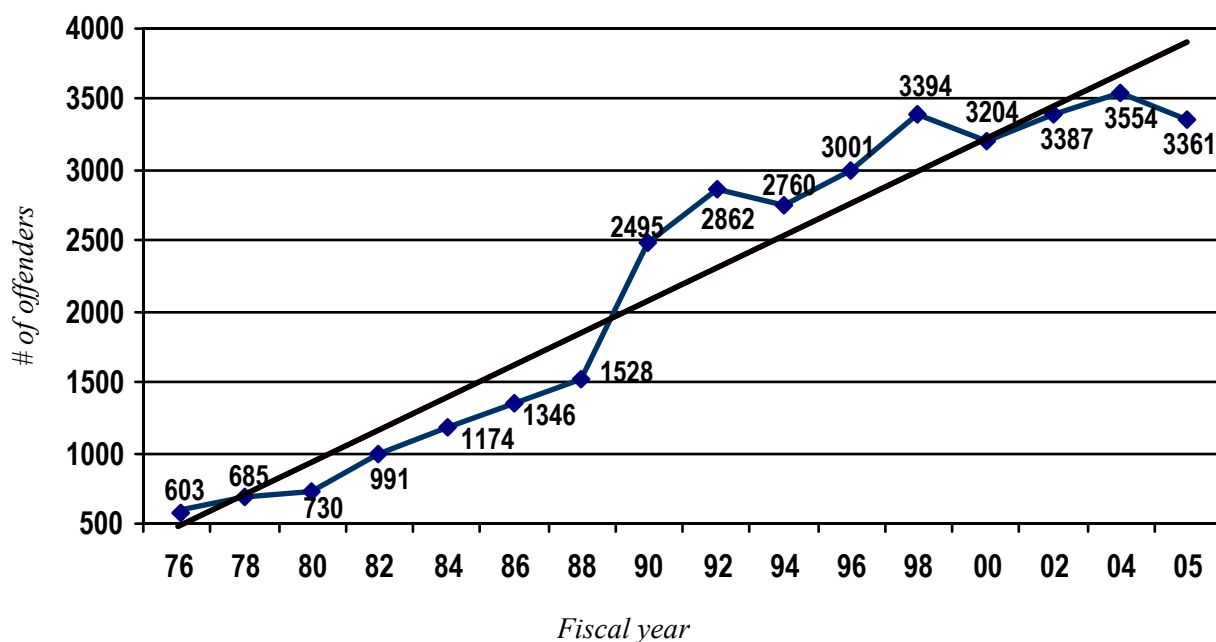
Acknowledgment should be made to Mr. Walter Fontaine, the Unit's original Principal Research Technician. Mr. Fontaine is responsible for the compilation of statistics from 1976 through the mid 1990's. In the early years, these statistics were documented on "spreadsheets" created using pen and paper.

In 2005, Ms. Ann-Marie Bandieri, the current Senior Research Technician, recognized the need to insure that the original statistics be securely maintained. She, along with Ms. Donna Narcovich, Senior Word Processing Typist, attended to entering all non-computerized statistics into Excel spreadsheets. Ms. Bandieri then initiated the creation of appropriate charts and graphs to illustrate the population from 1976 to present.

Ms. Bree Derrick, a current part-time employee through DataLogic Consulting, took interest in the project and spearheaded the expansion of the project to include RIDOC history information as well as appropriate comparative national information and data. This expansion provided significant context for consideration of the RIDOC data. Ms. Derrick is also responsible for the current format and report design.



RI's population at a glance (FY1976-FY2005)



The total inmate population (i.e., all awaiting trial and sentenced offenders, both male and female) experienced a 5 1/2-fold increase from FY1976 to FY2005. This represents 457% growth in the population over the past 30 years, or an average of 15.2% annually.

The majority of the growth in population occurred during the 1980's. From 80 to 89, the total prison population grew by an average of 17% annually, for a total increase of 172% (from 730 to 1987 offenders). During the 90's, the population continued to grow by an average of 3.6% each year. Thus far in the new millennium, the population has grown at about 1% per year.

Was the increase in the RI inmate population due solely to an increase in the State's population?

No. According to US Census data, RI's population only grew about 6% from 1980 to 2000 [1]. Speaking in relative terms, incarceration rates experienced a 156% increase during that time. In 1980, RI's incarceration rate was 77 offenders per 100,000 state residents. In 2000, the rate rose to 197 offenders per 100,000 residents [2].

Was there significantly more growth in one segment of the prison population?

No. There was significant growth in both the number of awaiting trial and sentenced inmates (*for more detail see page 10*). Similarly, there has been exponential growth in the male and female offender populations (*for more detail see page 11*).

How does Rhode Island compare nationally?

While incarceration rates in RI grew by 156% from 1980 to 2000, incarceration rates increased nationally 246% from 1980 to 2003 [3]. Despite RI's substantial increase in rates, RI had the fourth lowest incarceration rate in the country as of December 2003. The US currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world. According to the Department of Justice, 482 per 100,000 US residents are sentenced to incarceration, which is approximately 1 in every 109 men and 1 in every 1,613 women

US residents [4]. The US now has over half the world's prisons, despite the fact that America has less than 5% of the world's population.

What factors lead to the prison population explosion?

Prison populations are indirectly affected by many factors, but there are three factors which have an immediate impact: (1) the number new offenders admitted, (2) the length of time prisoners are incarcerated, and (3) the percentage of offenders leaving prison prior to the expiration of their sentence (e.g., via parole).

Nationally, the "War on Drugs" has been the chief factor in driving up prison populations across the country during the latter part of the 20th century. Federal legislative changes that occurred during the 1980's increased sentences for drug offenders and decreased the possibility of early release. As a result, prison populations began to contain more minor drug offenders and these offenders were required to serve longer sentences. This produced a "stacking effect," where this segment of the prison population remained incarcerated and new offenders continued to pile in. Nationally, the number of incarcerated persons grew to over 2.1 million by 2004 [5].

Below is a timeline demarcating major policy changes on a national level and the impact on Rhode Island's prison system.

Late 1960s	Recreational drug use among young, white, middle class Americans rises.
1971	President Nixon names drug abuse as "public enemy number one in the US." Nixon allots a majority of anti-drug money to treatment rather than law enforcement [6].
1972 (RI)	The Rhode Island Department of Corrections was created by statute and has formal jurisdiction over the Adult Correctional Institutions and Probation and Parole [7].
1974	Nixon resigns. The new Ford administration recommends that "priority in Federal efforts in both supply and demand reduction be directed toward those drugs which inherently pose a greater risk to the individual and to society." Drugs named as high priority include heroin, amphetamines and mixed barbiturates [6].
Late 1970s	Cocaine use is on the rise and is glamorized by the media.
1980s (RI)	The DOC embarked on long-term building /constructions campaign to increase the number of beds to meet the needs of the increasing prisoner population [7]. The RI population starts to see steady increases in population from year to year.
1981 (RI)	High Security Center opened, with a capacity of 96 cells [7].
1982 (RI)	Intake Service Center opened, with a capacity of 96 cells [7].



- 1984 (RI) The Gloria McDonald building was opened as a women's prison [7].
- 1984 Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign becomes the centerpiece of the Reagan administration's anti-drug policy. The movement focuses on white, middle class children and is funded by corporate and private donations [6].
- 1985 Crack cocaine begins to flourish in the northeast. Crack is cheap and powerfully addictive and devastates inner city neighborhoods.
- 1986 Reagan signs the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. This bill provides \$1.7 billion to fight the drug crisis. \$97 million is allocated to build new prisons, \$200 million for drug education and \$241 million for treatment. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act also created mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders. It also created a great sentencing disparity between powder cocaine and crack (5 kilograms of cocaine is punishable by at least 10 years in prison while 5 grams of crack leads to a mandatory 5-year sentence) [6].
- 1986 (RI) The War on Drugs intensifies in RI with the introduction of crack. There was an increase in penalties for minor drug violations. RI Parole Guidelines were modified to increase the amount of time served until parole eligibility for drug offenders [8].
- 1988 (RI) The General Assembly passed legislation making possession of as little as 1 oz of heroin or cocaine subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years. Voters amended the State constitution to permit denial of bail in cases of drug offenses carrying a sentence of 10 years or more. [10]
- As a result, the RI population begins a sharp climb, growing 85% from 1986 to 1990.
- 1989 President Bush (41) created the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the drug 'czar' to lead it. Federal spending on law enforcement increases; treatment receives less than 1/3 of the total budget.
- 1990 (RI) The Price Medium Security facility opened as a special needs unit [7].
- 1992 (RI) The Intake Service Center (North side) was opened, with a capacity for 900 offenders [7].
- The Moran Medium Security facility was opened, with a capacity of 870 male inmates [7].
- 1993 (RI) The Price Medium Security, special needs facility, was closed due to budget cuts [7].
- 1995 US Sentencing Commission recommends modifying mandatory sentencing guidelines to reduce the disparity between crack and powder cocaine. For the first



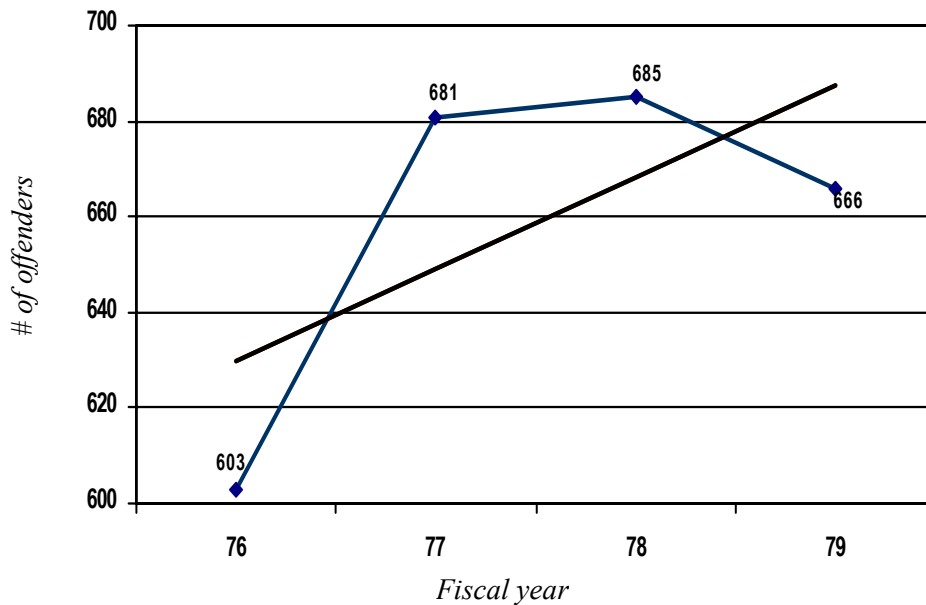
time in history, Congress overrides this recommendation. Clinton agrees with Congress and signs the rejection into law [6].

- 1996 The federal government creates the Violent Offender Incarceration/Truth-in-Sentencing Initiative. Monies are doled out to increase time served for violent offenders and increase construction of prisons for violent offenders. RI is awarded a grant and expands Medium Price by 88 beds and Women's Division awaiting trial beds by 45. Also, RIDOC begins renovating the Reintegration Unit, which will eventually house about 200 inmates who would otherwise expire sentences from a medium or maximum-security facility [8].
- 1997 (RI) The Price Medium Security facility was reopened.
- 1998 Human Rights Watch reports that 30% of all new sentenced admissions to state prisons and 58% of those to Federal prisons are for drug charges [9].
- 2002 The federal government responds to the growing number of offenders being released to the streets after long terms of incarceration. Under the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, RI is awarded \$1.9 million dollars to address reentry needs [8].
- 2003(RI) Governor Carcieri issues an executive order that establishes a Governor's Steering Committee on corrections reform and prisoner reentry. This committee was established to create a comprehensive plan and systematic approach to promoting reentry strategies for all offenders prior to release from incarceration with continued support from probation and parole, community-based agencies and all other State agencies after release [8].



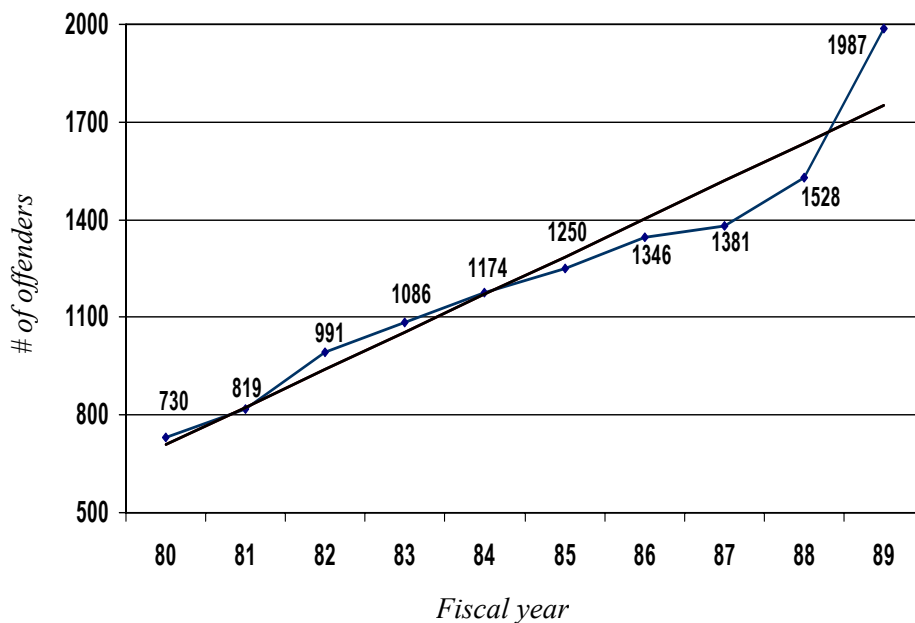
Total population by Decade

Total population FY 1976 – FY 1979



From FY1976 to FY 1979, the average total population increased by 10%.

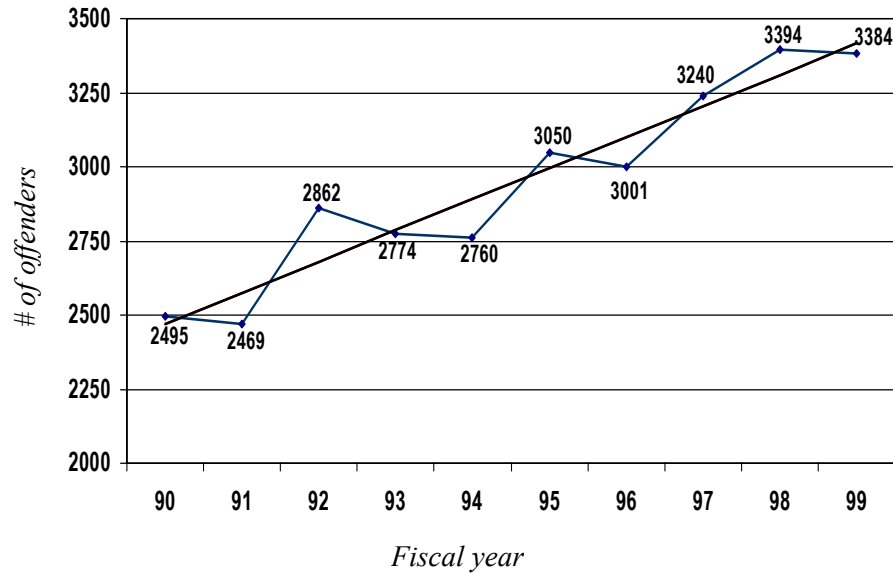
Total population FY 1980 – FY 1989



From FY 1980 to FY 1989, the average total population increased 172%.

In comparison to the latter part of the 70's, the average total population increased 48% from FY86 to FY89.

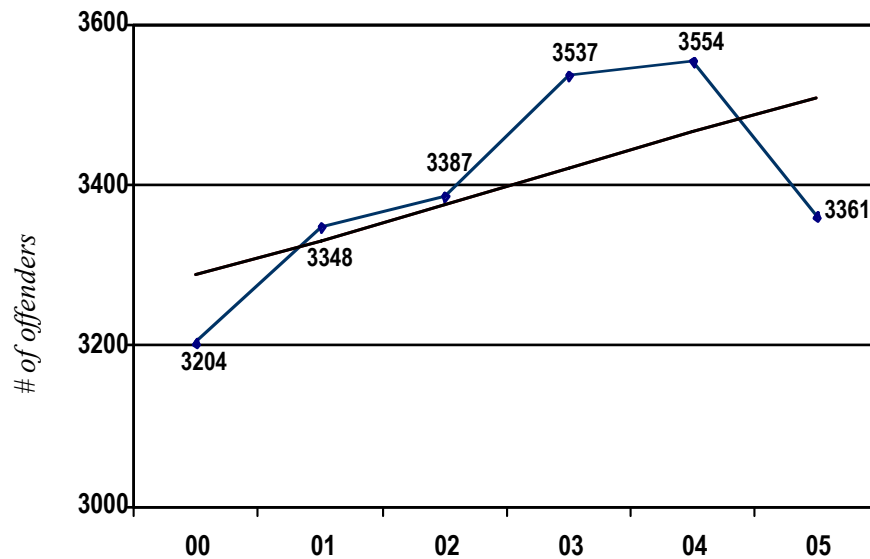
Total population FY 1990 – FY 1999



From FY 1990 to FY 1999, the average total population increased 36%.

From FY 1996 to FY 1999, the average total population increased 13%.

Total population FY 2000 – FY 2005

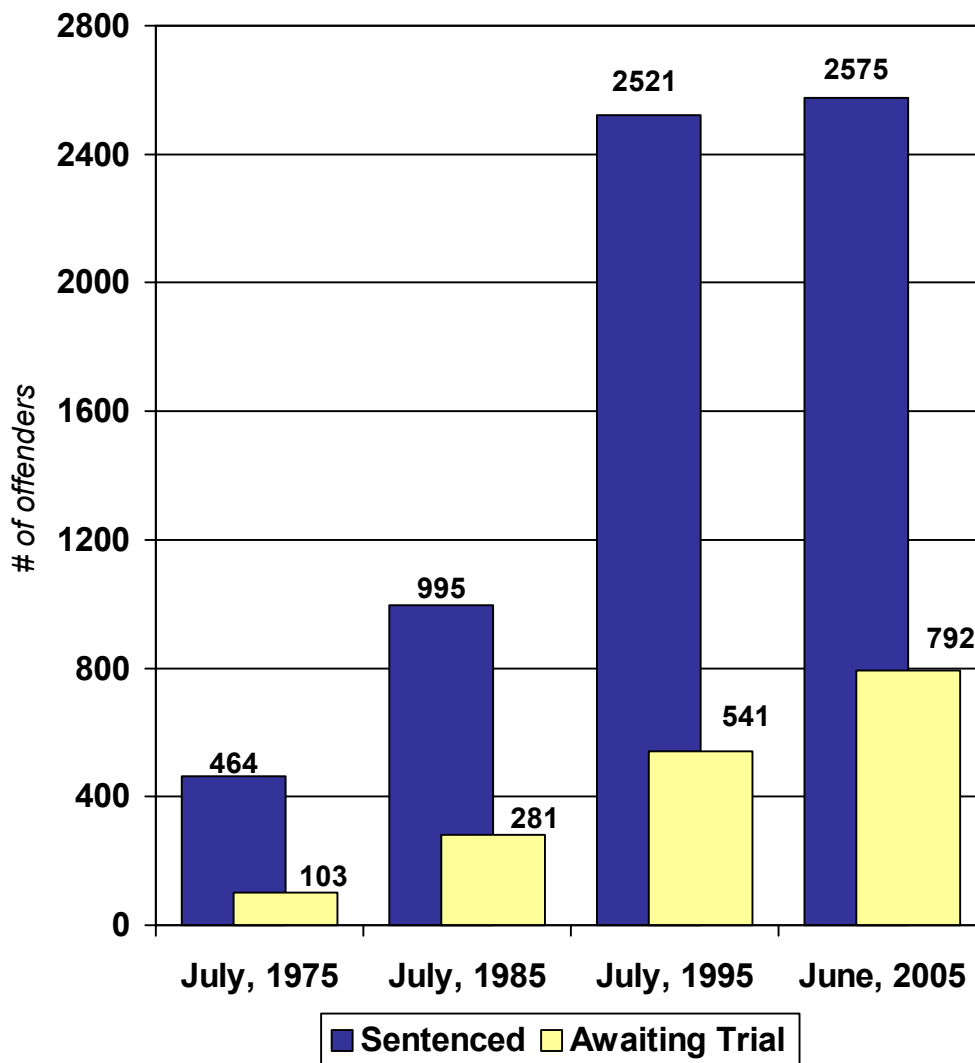


From FY 2000 to FY 2005, the average total population increased 5%.

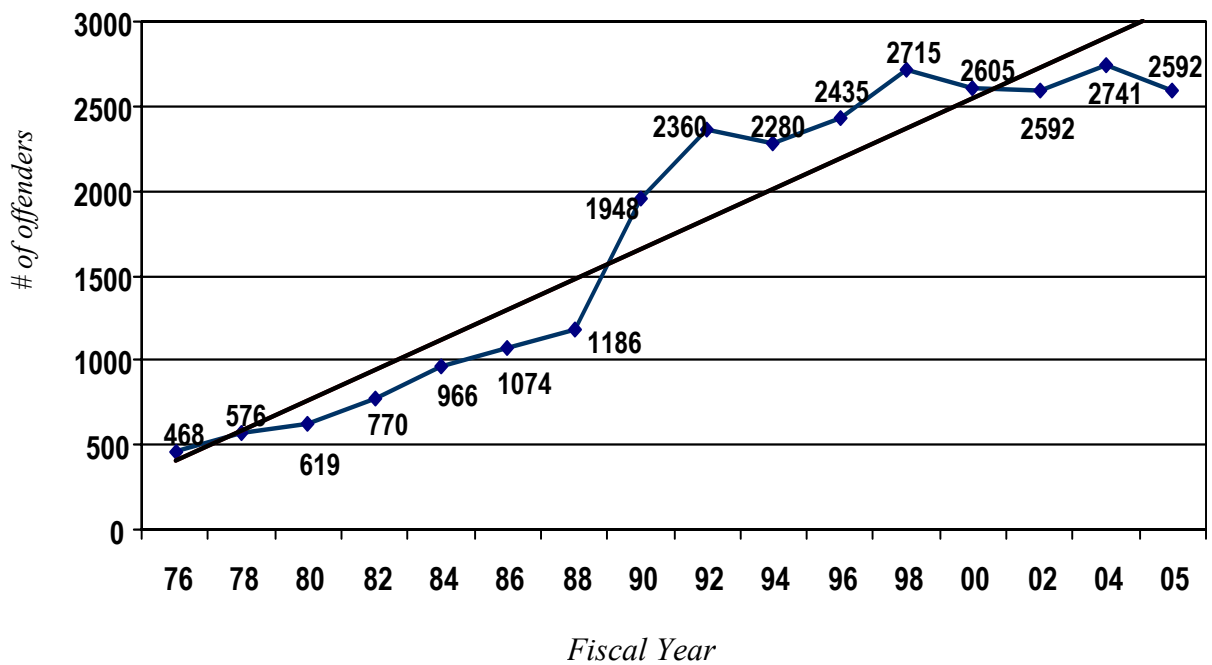
Population by Inmate Status

Was there more growth in either the awaiting trial or sentenced offender populations?

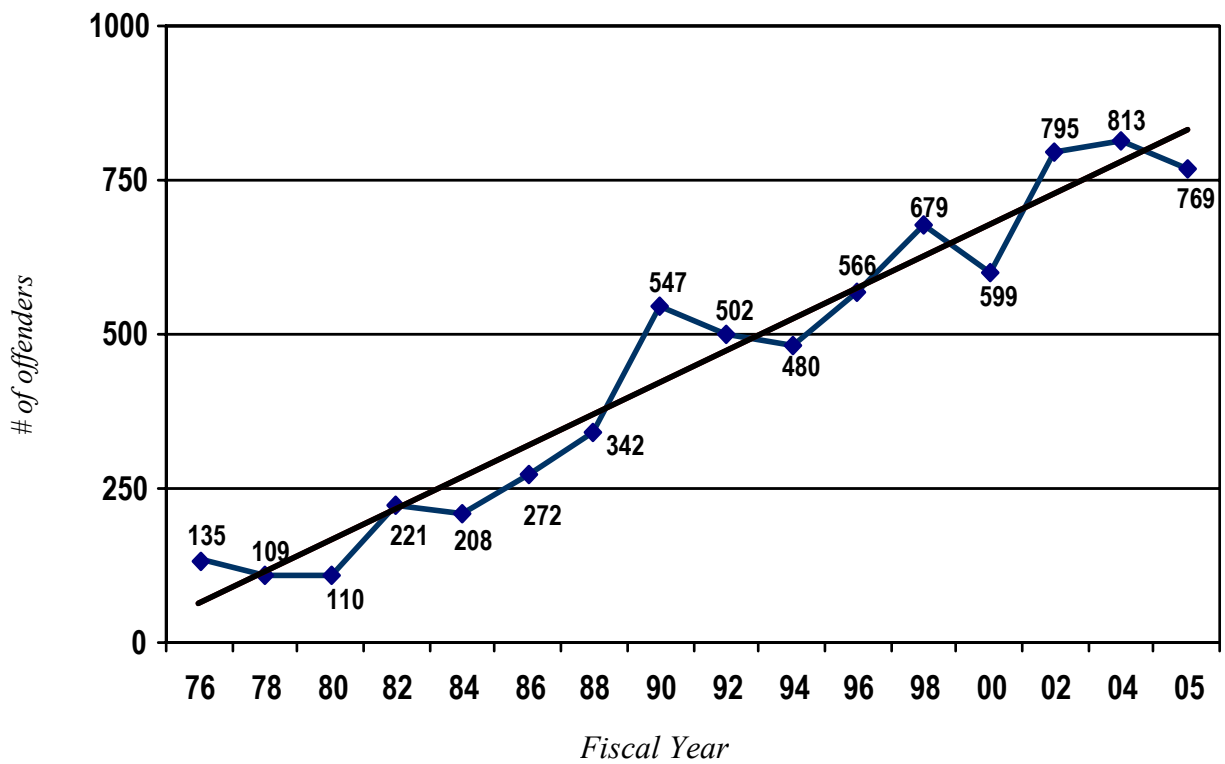
The sentenced population increased 454% during the past 30 years, while the awaiting trial population increased slightly more rapidly (470%) during the same period. In 1975, the awaiting trial population represented 18% of the total prison population. In 2005, awaiting trial offenders made up 24% of the total population.



Sentenced Inmates



Awaiting Trial Inmates

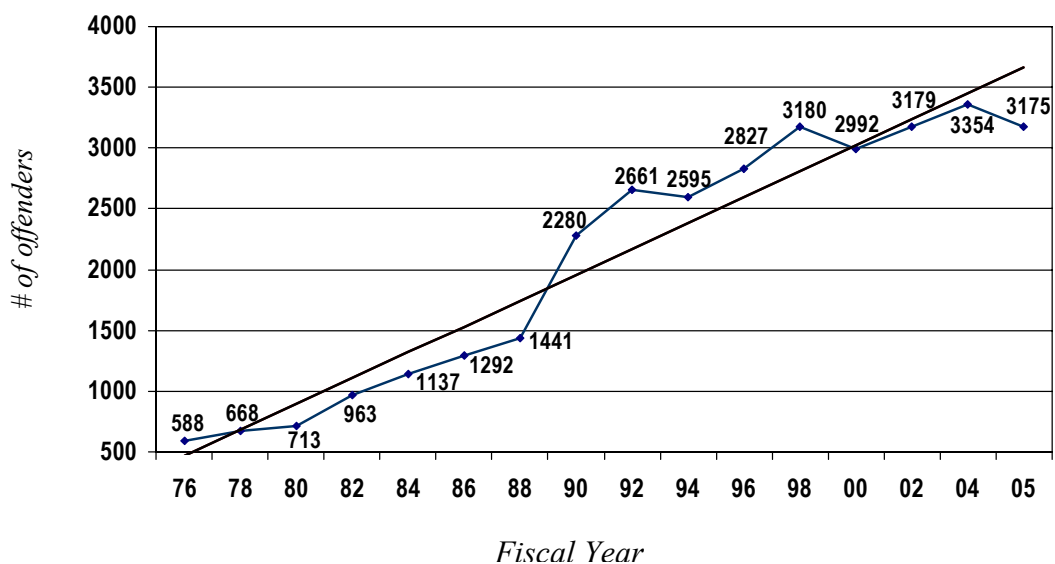


Population by Inmate Sex

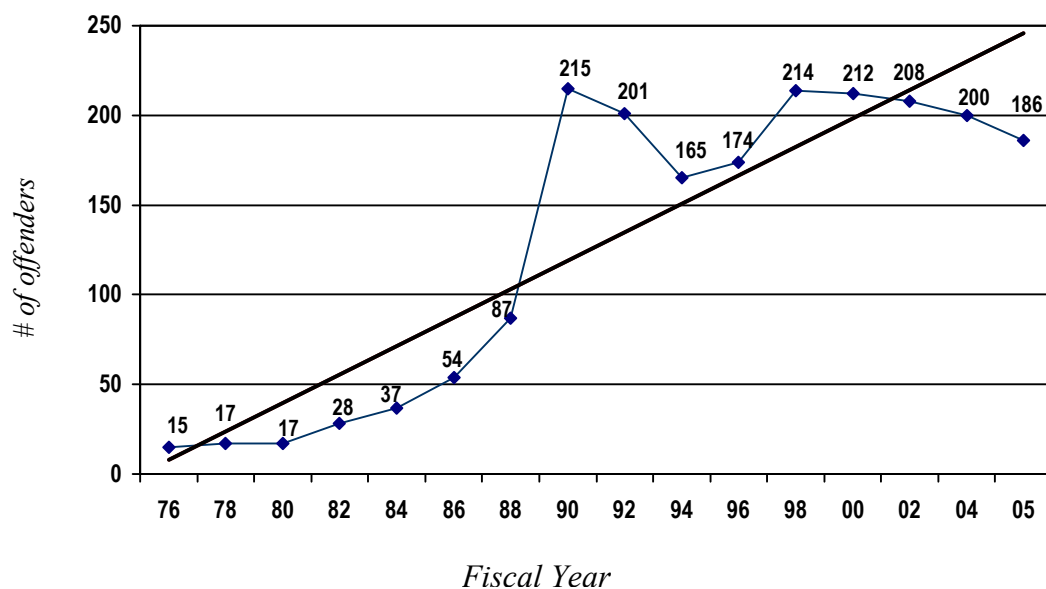
Did the number of female and male offenders grow equally?

While the male inmate population increased 440% over the past 30 years, the female population grew by over 1140%. Despite this incredible escalation in female inmates, female offenders constitute only 5% of the total RIDOC population. Interestingly, this is twice the proportion that females represented in 1976 (2.5%). The increase in both the male and female populations from the mid to late 80's through the early 90's can be primarily attributed to the "War on Drugs" movement that was taking place during the same time period [10]. Changes in Parole Board guidelines [10] and increased attention to female prostitution offenders also contributed to the population rise [11].

Male Inmates



Female Inmates



Can other trends be teased out of the total population changes?

Offense Category Information

Given the legislative changes that took place during the 80's and the population increases that followed, it is reasonable to assume that one led to the other. However, since manually-collected data by the Planning & Research Unit captured only the most serious crime for which an offender was incarcerated, this cannot be fully demonstrated with the data. Specifically, the data reflect only the most serious offense in instances when an offender committed a drug crime in conjunction with a more serious crime (e.g., robbery). Therefore, while the percentage of the prison population incarcerated for drug-related offenses has nearly tripled from 7% in 1977 to 18% in 2005, it is believe that this is an underestimate of the role that drugs have played in increasing RI's prison population.

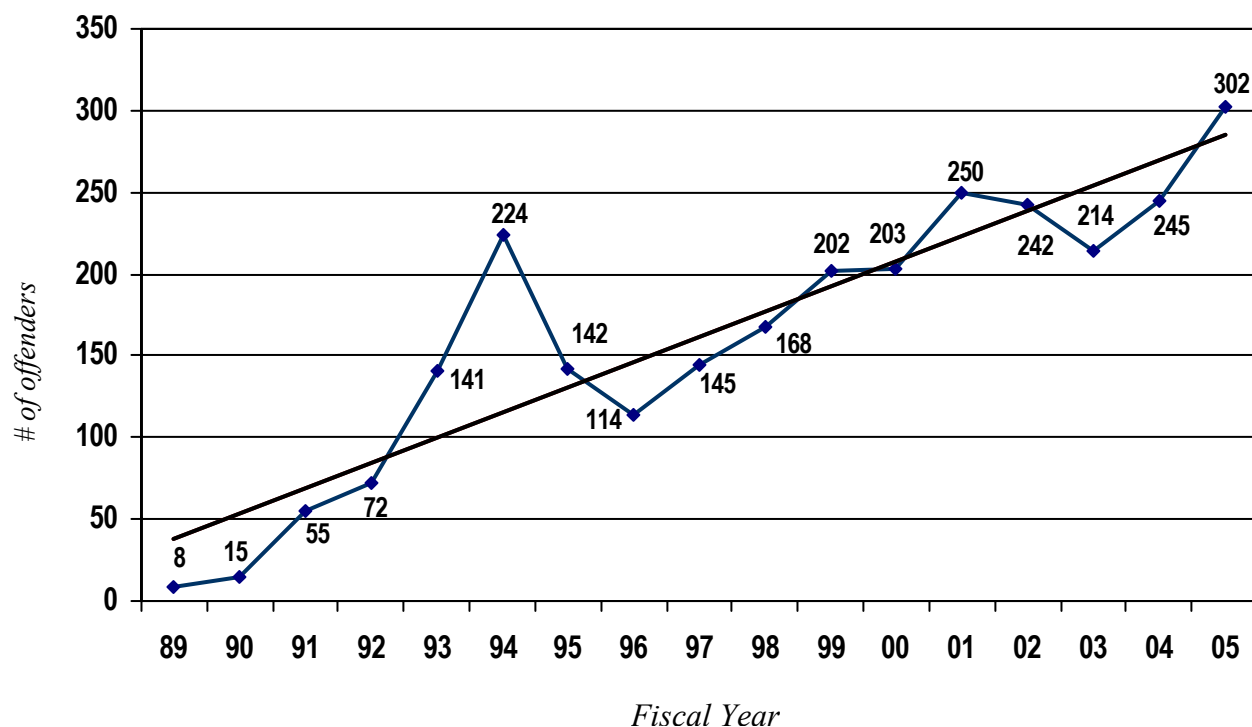
Racial Category Information

We are able to observe changes in the racial composition of the offender population. In 1974, 76% of the population was White and 23% was Black. During the 80's, the percentage of Whites decreased (66% in 1986), while the percentage of Blacks remained stable. The Hispanic population appeared for the first time in 1986 (8.5%). At present, the percentage of Hispanic offenders continues to rise (19% in 2005), while the percentages of White offenders decreased slightly (52%) and the percentage of Black offenders remained relatively stable (28%).



Community Confinement Population

As expected, the community confinement program has grown significantly since its beginning in 1989. In 1992, legislation was passed which expanded the community confinement program to include offenders who had been convicted of sale/delivery or possession of any schedule I or II controlled substance. In addition, the new law gave the Director of the DOC the authority to administratively classify offenders to community confinement. These two changes (in particular, the former) led to a dramatic increase in the community confinement population from 1992 to 1994. Interestingly, the community confinement population is currently at an all time high of 302 offenders. This represents a 23% increase over FY 2004.

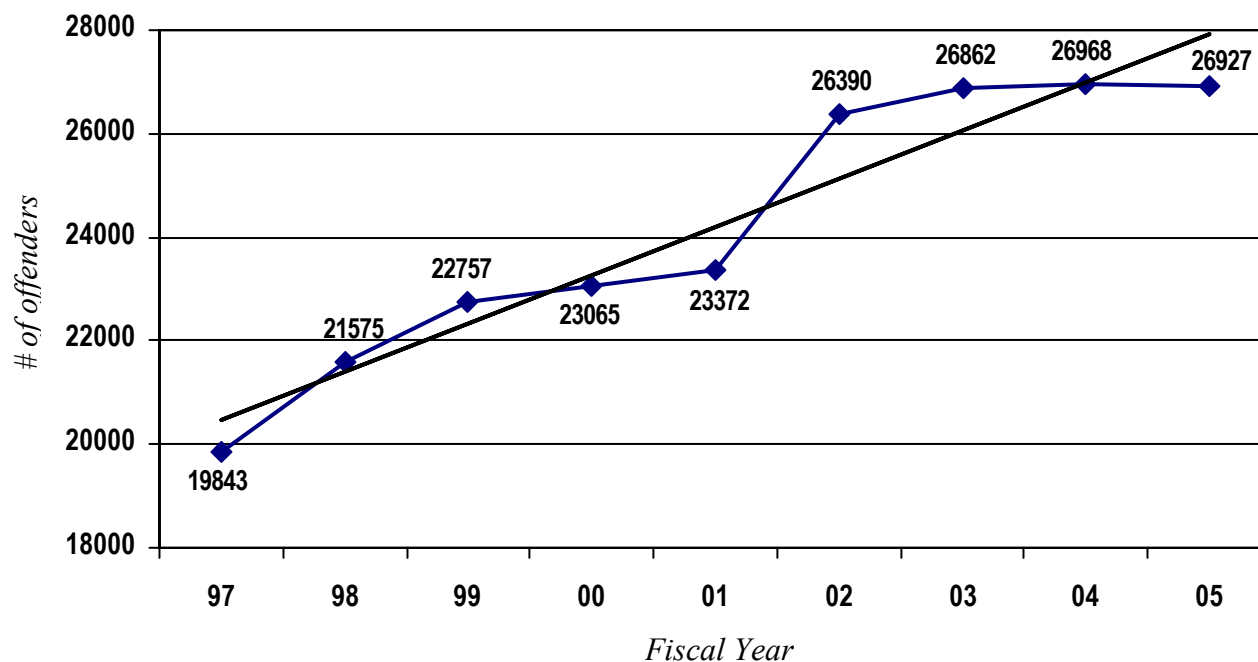


Probation & Parole Population (1997-present)

Data for probation & parole are only available from 1997 to present.

How does RI compare in terms of community supervision?

As of December 2003, RI ranked 2nd in the nation in rate of probation supervision (3,143 per 100,000 residents). In 2002, RI ranked 5th. This 2003 rate is 67% higher than the national average of 1,876 per 100,000. RI ranked 1st in the Northeast, followed by Massachusetts with 2,585 probationers per 100,000 adult residents. [12]



Where is the population headed?

As can be viewed on page 16, RI has historically utilized community supervision to a greater extent than our New England neighbors. As a result, RI ranked 8th in the nation in total rate of correctional supervision (incarceration, probation, and parole) in 2002 [2]. Conversely, RI continues to have one of the lowest incarceration rates in the country. In fact, the institutional population in the state has slowed to an average growth of 1% per year since 2000. Most recently, the RI prison population experienced a slight decrease from 3554 in FY 2004 to 3361 in FY 2005.

Given the increasing availability of alternatives to lengthy periods of incarceration (e.g., drug court, home confinement, transitional housing, etc.), it is likely that the number of offenders in the community will continue to grow. Concurrently, prison growth will likely continue, but at a more conservative rate.

It is also hopeful that the current national and state Prisoner Reentry initiatives will be successful in guiding released offenders to becoming productive, law-biding citizens. The involvement of ALL state and local agencies in this initiative and the acknowledgement that released offenders are more than just the responsibility of the corrections agency is a major cultural change. It is this change that should provide for long standing commitment and successful outcomes.



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